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Was There Treason?

THE DISASTER at the Bay of Pigs has been illuminated during the past few days by the recollections of two of President Kennedy's principal aides, and by a published interview with the former Central Intelligence Agency official who was the chief architect of the invasion.

Theodore C. Sorensen and Arthur W. Schlesinger Jr., now disgorging high-priced memoirs in *Look* and *Life*, respectively, agree in general—after the debacle Kennedy felt he had been deceived on key points regarding the invasion, and he reproached himself for trusting the "experts."

But the interview with Richard M. Bissell Jr., the principal planner of the operation, copyrighted by the *Washington Star*, reflects none of Kennedy's pre-invasion doubts.

The Bissell interview contains only one notable insight—the fear that if the invasion were canceled (a move which Kennedy was sorely tempted to make) the Cuban exile force ("the most powerful military force between Mexico and Panama") might run riot throughout Guatemala, Honduras or Nicaragua.

But the truth—a truth that is amply documented and scandalously ignored—is that Kennedy would not have succeeded in calling off the invasion even if he had tried. The CIA, according to unchallenged testimony that is on the public record, told invasion leaders a few days before the scheduled landing at the Bay of Pigs that it was possible the invasion would be called off by Washington.

If that took place, the CIA's mysterious "Frank" (who was the chief training officer for the invasion force) told exile leaders that they were to take their CIA shepherds prisoner and go ahead with the planned landing.

This account of contingency treason is contained in interviews with three of the leaders of the ill-fated Brigade 2506. The interviews were taken by Haynes Johnson and published in his meticulously documented book, "*The Bay of Pigs*."

Of all the revelations about the shabby double-dealing that led to a humiliating defeat for the United States, the planned betrayal of Kennedy is the most shocking. But equally shocking is the fact that this sensational imputation of disloyalty to a high CIA officer has been completely ignored by Congress, which finds time to investigate everything, and by President Johnson.

The men who made the charge are not irresponsible. Indeed, they were the CIA's choice to lead the invasion. Two of them, Jose Perez San Roman (commanding officer of Brigade 2506) and Ernesto Oliva (his deputy) are now officers in the United States Army. The third, Manuel Artime, was the civilian leader of the exile force that came to grief at the Bay of Pigs.

Artime, San Roman and Oliva "never doubted that Frank was speaking for his superiors," Johnson wrote. "It seemed obvious to them that the brigade could not be transported to another unknown base, and then placed aboard ships to go to Cuba without the knowledge and assistance of a great organization."

The only conclusion that the sensible observer can draw is that the power of the elephantine, unaccountable CIA is now so great that no organism of government dares challenge it, however compelling the circumstances may be. If the true history of the CIA is ever written (and one man who would have been an unexcelled source was murdered on a Dallas street less than a year after the Bay of Pigs catastrophe), no better prologue could be found than Sir John Harrington's words on treason:

"Treason doth never prosper; What's the reason? Why, if it prospers, none dare call it treason."